# APPENDIX 7: Future Research Potential at Low Hauxley

## Themes

The following are possible themes which may be considered for future research or investigation. The options (8.1) to which they are most pertinent have been listed with each category.

## A7.1 Category-specific research topics

Publication of the data or further work on the site would require a number of category-specific points to be addressed. These were originally raised within individual specialist assessments but have been grouped here to illustrate the range of potential research topics generated by this study. Where specific recommendations were made in the specialists' assessments these can be found in the relevant archive report and reference should obviously be made to these as part of any consideration for future work.

#### A7.1.1 The lithic assemblage

Based on Middleton (1995)

The present assemblage is too small, in terms of both individual pieces and as a whole, for any more detailed analysis. Should any further fieldwork be undertaken, the key however, to the elucidation of site formation and function will lie in the acquisition of a larger assemblage derived from secure contexts. It appears that the use of different flint sources may be the means to delineating periods of activity on the site. Data collection should be followed by more detailed examination of the sources by comparison with extant local assemblages of both Mesolithic and early Bronze Age date. (Options 3 and 5)

#### A7.1.2 The animal bone

Based on Stallibrass (1995)

Any future fieldwork should seek to explore the way in which hunter-gatherer groups might have exploited a locality which incorporated three very different habitats within a short distance of the site: inland terrestrial habitats, adjacent freshwater habitats, and coastal/marine habitats to the east. Extremely few Mesolithic sites in Britain (or Europe) are known from such rich catchment areas. An examination should be made of precisely what biological resources may have been available and how they are represented in the archaeological record. This requires further investigation of the peat deposits in the area, including those immediately north and south of the spur, the intertidal peats adjacent to the site, and those to the south of Druridge Bay. Low Hauxley has excellent potential for the good preservation of faunal remains within the waterlogged areas. Other Mesolithic sites in a similar context (*eg* Star Carr and Seamer Carr), tend to suggest that faunal waste was systematically thrown into the water, creating a 'toss-zone' where it is extremely well preserved. The same points can be made with regard to faunal remains from the later deposits. (Options 3, 4, and 5)

#### A7.1.3 Botanical analysis

Based on Huntley (1995)

The possibility of examining intertidal peats which are related to the area should be considered. Should further erosion continue then the seaward peats are considered most likely to reward further work in that they may extend the chronology back beyond the 4000 years already established. (Options 4 and 5)

#### A7.1.4 The invertebrate assemblage

Based on Issitt, Kenward, and Milles (1995)

The existing samples all have some potential for site reconstruction using invertebrate analysis *provided* they can be set into an appropriate archaeological and time framework. A well-planned programme of sampling, in combination with radiocarbon dating, over a wide area of the site, using columns with a narrow sampling interval where appropriate and followed by processing of subsamples large enough for recovery of interpretable insect assemblages, is essential should further excavation be considered appropriate. Since the waterlogged deposits are associated with Mesolithic and Bronze Age occupation they have considerable potential for providing information of wider importance for these periods, poorly known in terms of detailed reconstruction of ecologies influenced by human activity. (Options 2, 3, and 4)

#### A7.1.5 The soils

Based on Payton and Usai (1995)

Further analysis of the material from Trench D1, including thin section and particle size analysis, would reinforce the current interpretation and add more detail and environmental information. To understand fully the sequence of events it is necessary to obtain $^{14}C$ dating for the upper and lower part of the peat in Profiles D1D and D1E. Results will be more widely applicable if soil analysis is accompanied by plant, pollen, diatom and invertebrate analysis. The archaeological significance of the results will be improved by peat dating. (Option 2)

#### A7.1.6 Environmental evidence

Based on comments by Tipping and Tooley

The examination of the peats to the north of the identified archaeological deposits (Innes and Frank 1988) had already begun the debate on the influence of sea-level change on the inception of the peat and the subsequent burial by dune sand. This and subsequent (Tipping) pollen and stratigraphic evidence broadly agree on points concerning the water-table fluctuations. Further work could assist the clarification of the effect of sea-level or climate change pertinent to site formation. A more refined diatom analysis from the clays could contribute to a fuller understanding (Tippping pers comm). (Option 5)

## A7.2 Wider themes raised by the evaluation

The results of the evaluation phase have demonstrated without question that the significance accorded by Hardie (NCC nd) was a valid assertion and the quality of data is such that conclusions drawn from any further schedule of investigation will add to the understanding of the activity of prehistoric peoples in general.

A number of questions, may be indicated, relating to all three chronological periods recognised during preliminary investigation of the site.

#### A7.2.1 The late Mesolithic

Mesolithic activity is not well charted or understood within Northumberland. Neither upland nor lowland survey has produced a great deal of evidence and the percentage of known sites excavated is only half the national average (Anon 1991). Whilst the very pronounced lack of Mesolithic sites is likely to be in part a genuine reflection of the level of activity during that period, it must be noted that the nondescript, and ill-defined nature of the known flint assemblages has made its recognition rather more difficult than in some other regions (Burgess 1972, 60). Also, it must be acknowledged that the research agenda pursued by the

principal field-workers, especially in the northern uplands, might have caused a significant bias away from the easy recognition of Mesolithic flint assemblages. There is, however, sufficient evidence to draw some general conclusions: there appears to be little early Mesolithic activity, there appears to have been less upland activity than elsewhere, and there appears to be a broad correlation of known sites with the present coastal strip (Raistrick 1934, but still applicable).

**A7.2.2 The intervening period**

Attention has been drawn in recent years to the marked correlation, especially amongst coastal sites, between Mesolithic flint sites and Beaker/EBA monuments (NCC nd, 39). Whilst this coincidence is not universal it appears to be more frequent than can be accounted for by chance. The recent revision in dating for certain groups of organic artefacts hitherto regarded as exclusively Mesolithic in date (Mellars 1970, then Smith and Bonsall 1991), which has much extended their date range, must raise the possibility that hunter-gatherer economic strategies may have remained both attractive and, more importantly, viable in the region as late as the second millennium BC. Both Thomas (1988) and Young (1987, 116) have argued a cogent case for prolonged and co-operative contact between hunter-gatherer and farming groups, and in an area such as Northumberland, where the Neolithic occupation seems to have been generally sparse (again a concentration in the Milfield Basin) and would not have proved a significant drain on suitable land, it would not be difficult to see such interaction persisting almost *ad infinitum.*

Thomas (1988, 60) has further suggested that the transition between subsistence strategies was not abrupt but was rather a gradual blurring from one to the other, with hunter-gatherers developing or adopting whatever techniques were suited to their principal regime. Thus it is possible to envisage groups becoming perhaps more sedentary, or adopting a shifting agricultural regime (more a management of native plants than growing cereals). The use of simple techniques such as fire clearance and ring-barking would, over time, create a series of clearings in varying stages of regrowth which might well prove more attractive to intrusive groups such as Beaker users than wildwood. It seems reasonable to suggest that such clearance might well have been more extensive in resource rich areas like the Low Hauxley lakeside, which must have lain relatively close to the sea although it was demonstrably not coastal at the time, and thus could have proved doubly attractive to incoming agricultural groups - providing an abundant range of natural food resources alongside recently cleared areas and scrub regrowth which could be rapidly and relatively easily cleared for more intensive agriculture.

Equally, it is now accepted that hunter-gatherers followed a cyclic, largely seasonal regime and it appears that groups revisited some sites on numerous occasions, over extended periods. In time such sites presumably acquired a symbolic or cultural significance which, with nothing else to relate to, was presumably transferred to prominent landscape features, even if only as a mnemonic device to guide travel. Thus a ridge in otherwise low-lying wetland, such as that upon which the site at Low Hauxley lies, may well have early acquired a socio-cultural importance over and above any conferred by the availability of resources.

**A7.2.3 The Beaker/early Bronze Age**

Beaker and early Bronze Age funerary complexes in Northumberland, whilst known in reasonable numbers, are highly regional in distribution and few have been excavated (fewer still under modern conditions or with current research agenda in mind). In fact, although in a recent survey of excavations undertaken for the NAR the North East compared favourably with national averages with regard to the number of excavations of Bronze Age sites, it was stressed that many were 'barrow openings' by Canon Greenwell (See Kinnes and Longworth

1985), JC Atkinson, and others. It was suggested that in reality the Bronze Age, like all other periods, 'was underrepresented in excavation in the north-eastern counties' (Anon 1991, 124).

Only two Beaker settlement sites have been recognised in Northumberland, Old Yeavering and Ross Links, near Bamburgh. Neither are well preserved but it is of significance that the latter lies within the modern dune system. Bradley (1970, 369) has noted a tendency for Beaker barrows to be erected on derelict agricultural or settlement land: 'In practice, the quite large assemblages from the buried soils below some Beaker barrows are entirely sufficient to place them at least on the fringes of domestic sites'. Although no such activity was noted on the old ground surface beneath the Low Hauxley cairn, the possibility must remain that there was a settlement nearby, presumably similar to that assumed at Ross Links, near Bamburgh.